

# NEWS RELEASE

VirginiaDOT.org

RELEASE: IMMEDIATE

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Sept. 16, 2012

Media Emergency Number: (757) 925-2584

HR-1231

## **STATEMENT ON MULTIPLE FACILITY CLOSURES IN HAMPTON ROADS ON SEPTEMBER 15, 2012**

*Statement from Dennis Heuer, P.E. DBIA, VDOT Hampton Roads District Administrator:*

“The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) understands the frustrations and empathizes with the delays motorists experienced on Saturday, Sept. 15, due to the planned I-64 east Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel (HRBT) and the Route 17 south James River Bridge (JRB) weekend closures for maintenance activities. We have done our best to inform the public for the past month about these closures using all paid, social and earned media outlets we have at our disposal in the hopes motorists would be able to use this information, anticipate these delays and adjust their plans accordingly.

“The HRBT work has been planned for more than six months, before the Memorial Day holiday; however, because of the public outcry we experienced in May, we delayed the work until after the tourist season that officially ended Labor Day weekend. Living in a region so full of local festivals and events is very rewarding, but also creates unique challenges for the transportation planners charged with keeping our roads and facilities safe. While certain events that may draw thousands can justify delaying the work again, smaller events cannot.

“We knew the HRBT work would cause impacts that would result in delays—there was a nine-mile backup at the I-664 Monitor-Merrimac Memorial Bridge-Tunnel for most of the day Saturday; however we had alerted the public that this was a possibility and urged everyone to make adjustments to their plans. We had already waited as long as possible and the work needed to be completed before winter for safety.

“If the constant nine-mile delay at MMMBT was made worse by a significant issue, our emergency personnel would have initiated the plan to pull the HRBT work early to release the congestion, but to enact that plan can take upwards of two hours and would have also come with its own set of difficulties: one milled lane with jagged edges against a raised lane filled with potholes inside a tunnel with no shoulders can create a extremely dangerous driving situation that could only be allowable under the most dire of circumstances, and only for a short duration.

"Fortunately, our contractor's crews were able to complete the paving work slated for this weekend 15-hours early, to be able to open the I-64 east HRBT for motorists all of Sunday, Sept. 16. They did not open up early because of an outcry or pressure, but because of their ability to do their job efficiently and with little interruption.

"The James River Bridge is not considered an alternate route for the HRBT because the capacity of Bridge Road (Route 17) in Suffolk cannot accommodate the traffic load. Nor is the Jamestown-Scotland Ferry an advertised option for the HRBT for the same reason. The I-664 Monitor-Merrimac Memorial Bridge-Tunnel (MMMBT) is the alternate route for the HRBT.

"The JRB grid deck replacement project contract work was scheduled to begin in mid-September prior to the HRBT work being postponed in May. The north and south grid decks are not interchangeable, so there is no way possible for the contractor to change directions to accommodate the work being done at the HRBT. Additionally, the JRB contractor is under contract to complete their weekend closures before Thanksgiving and the beginning of the holiday season.

"VDOT's mission is to plan, deliver, operate and maintain a transportation system that is safe, enables easy movement of people and goods, enhances the economy and improves our quality of life. Performing this work, and notifying the public about the closures so that they can make educated decisions, is at the core of our mission.

"In Hampton Roads alone, VDOT has more than 600 lane closures scheduled each week on state maintained roads. It is a delicate balance we take between performing the necessary roadwork to maintain safety and limiting the inconvenience the work causes.

"The I-64 east HRBT will be closed for paving again next weekend starting on Friday at 9 p.m. We need to complete the work that was begun this weekend. While internally we will be reviewing the details of what occurred Saturday to potentially develop an additional mitigation strategy for next weekend, I urge motorists to make a plan for themselves and anticipate delays traveling from the Peninsula to the Southside during this time."